

Controversies of the 1920s

★ Interpreting Primary Sources

Sacco and Vanzetti

I am not only innocent...but...in all my life I have never stole, never killed, never spilled blood, but I have struggled all my life, since I began to reason, to eliminate crime from the earth....

I am suffering because I am a radical and indeed I am a radical; I have suffered because I was an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian...but I am so convinced to be right that if you could execute me two times, and if I could be reborn two other times, I would live again to do what I have done already.

Bartolomeo Vanzetti, 1927

Child Labor

If there is any matter upon which civilized countries have agreed...it is the evil of premature and excessive child labor.....It is not for this Court...to say that [Prohibition]...is permissible against strong drink, but not as against the product of ruined lives.

Justice Holmes's dissent in *Hammer v. Dagenhart*

Evolution and Religion

What has religion to do with facts? Nothing. Is there any such thing as Methodist mathematics, Presbyterian botany, Catholic astronomy, or Baptist biology? What has any form of superstition or religion to do with a fact or with any science? Nothing but to hinder, delay or embarrass.

Robert G. Ingersoll

Be it Enacted, by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, that it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the universities, normals, and all other public schools in the State, which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach the theory that denies the story of the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.

Tennessee state law

What is Darwinism? It is Atheism.

Charles Hodge

Evolution is God's way of doing things.

John Fiske

Evolution, applied to religion, will influence it only as the hidden temples are restored, by removing the sands which have drifted in from the arid deserts of scholastic and medieval theologies. It will change theology, but only to bring out the simple temple of God in clearer and more beautiful lines and proportions.

Rev. Henry Ward Beecher

The first objection to Darwinism is that it is only a guess and was never anything more....The second objection to Darwin's guess is that it has not one syllable in the Bible to support it. This ought to make Christians cautious about accepting it without thorough investigation....Third--Neither Darwin nor his supporters have been able to find a fact in the universe to support their hypothesis. With millions of species, the investigators have not been able to find one single instance in which one species has changed into another...

Theistic evolution may be defined as an anesthetic which deadens the patient's pain while atheism removes his religion.

William Jennings Bryan

Here we find to-day as brazen and as bold an attempt to destroy learning as was ever made in the Middle Ages and the open difference is we have not provided that malefactors shall be burned at the stake. But here is time for that, your Honor. We have to approach these things gradually....

If to-day you can take a thing like evolution and make it a crime to teach it in the public school...at the next session you may ban books and newspapers....Ignorance and fanaticism are ever busy and need feeding. Always they are anxious and gloating for more.

Clarence Darrow

★ Questions To Think About

- 1. Why were many Americans in the early 1920s hostile toward immigrants and foreign political ideas?**
- 2. How would you explain the opposition to a prohibition on child labor?**
- 3. Why do you think the issue of evolution become a cause célèbre in the 1920s?**